

CHURCH NEWS

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The
United
Reformed
Church

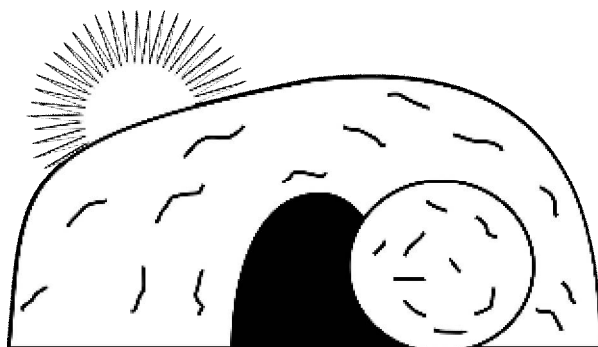
MARCH 2024

Friends,

Looking for the Resurrection

In the Nicene Creed we say *'We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.'* In the gospel accounts of the resurrection there is a lot of looking and seeing. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went early to the tomb. They saw the stone rolled aside and inside the tomb a young man dressed in white said to them: *'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.'* (Mark 16: 6).

Like the women we would probably have been left *'trembling and bewildered'* by what we saw that morning. Had the body been taken? Was the young man an angel or deceiver? Was Jesus raised to life again, or was this an elaborate hoax?



Easter gives us a choice. **We can approach life looking for disappointment, fear and despair, or, we can look for resurrection and find not just an empty tomb, but encounter the living Christ.** He continues to meet us in our daily lives bringing new hope, forgiveness of sin, healing and wholeness and the assurance of his presence through the darkest of times.

God invites us to see our lives differently and look for Christ's resurrection life, at work in our lives and in the people around us.

Canon Paul Hardingham
Parish Pump

NEWS AROUND THE FELLOWSHIP

We were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Geof Thompson. The following notice appeared in the Stockport Express and Manchester Evening News

THOMPSON Geoffrey

Geof passed away peacefully at Bramhall Manor Care Centre on 7th February aged 84 years. He lived for many years in Cheadle Hulme and was an active member of Cheadle Civic Society.

At his request, there will be no formal funeral as he chose to be cremated by Pure Cremation His ashes will be scattered along with those of his beloved wife Val. Any donations in memory of Geof, please pay directly to The Christie or St Ann's Hospice.

We are thinking of others in our congregation who have been in hospital or unwell at home for any reason. We also remember those who have recently been bereaved, including Geof Thompson's two nephews by marriage and his good friend Ann. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.

Our thanks go to our in-house worship leaders along with Christopher Whitehead and Rev Kurauone Mutimwii for leading our services in February. Pastor K included the induction of Philip Oliver to continue serving as an Elder.

Our Coffee Morning on 2 FEB raised £32.70 for The Leprosy Mission.

The last 3 sessions of the Joint Lent Bible Study will be held on Wed 6, Thu 14 and Thu 21 MAR in the Bramhall Conference Room, from 7~8pm.

The Afternoon Tea which was publicized in the February magazine to be held on Sun 10 March, **has been postponed** – an alternative date is yet to be decided. It was felt that members/friends might have other commitments, it being Mothering Sunday.

We send best wishes to all those who will be celebrating a birthday or special anniversary in March. We hope you have a very happy time.

The News Team

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

29 MAR GOOD FRIDAY at Gatley 10.30am

SUN 31 MAR -Joint service ~Heald Green URC

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THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who attended mum's memorial service and also to those who made donations to her chosen charity the RNLI.

A total of £284.00 was raised for this great cause.

Grieve and Gee families.

Transport Fund

We now have a fund to help everyone with difficulties getting to any church events, even events at another church or events not actually at a church like the Fellowship. This takes the form of an account with a taxi company that has a password for which you need to see me for details.

Alison Stevens

CHURCHES TOGETHER

The
WORLD DAY OF PRAYER
from Palestine

at St Ann's RC Church

went wonderfully -thank
you.

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LENT LUNCHES 12 noon ~ 2pm

2 MAR – United

Reformed Church

9 MAR – All Saints Parish Church

16 MAR – Friends Meeting House

23 MAR – Methodist Church



Everyone Welcome

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Members, friends & neighbours

FILM MATINEE

Sat 23 MARCH

THE CROSSROAD

The road was hard, no turning back,
The way ordained by mighty God.
'Your will, not mine' was all He said,
As humbly down that path He trod.

The crowd that cheered Him once with palms
Began to shout for Him to die,
They chose Barabbas in his stead
And with one voice cried 'Crucify!'

Between two thieves on Calvary's hill
They put to death the Prince of Life
One cried for help, the other cursed.
The first was promised Paradise.

This promise now is for us all:
Christ gave His life to set us free.
The Cross divides, it always will -
The question is: what side are we?

By Megan Carter

MOTHER'S AWARDS

A man was decorating his new den and decided it was a good place to display all the awards he and his two sons had won at various athletic competitions. When he had filled two whole walls, he remarked to his wife that it was a shame she had no awards to contribute.

Next day, she produced, neatly framed, the birth certificates of their two sons, and added them to the display...

Parish Pump

CROSSWORD ANSWERS P6

ACROSS: 1, Wine. 3, The alert. 8, Ooze. 9, Passover. 11, Garden Tomb. 14, Cannot. 15, Elisha. 17, Gethsemane. 20, Own house. 21, Lisa. 22, Flogging. 23, Styx.

DOWN: 1, Wrong act. 2, Nazarene. 4, Health. 5, Assemblies. 6, Envy. 7, Turn. 10, Before long. 12, Iscariot. 13, Take care. 16, The Son. 18, Loaf. 19, Unto.

MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Steering Group (~ Elders of the Partnership) have produced a Prayer Diary containing a prayer for each partnership church and each minister. Each is assigned to a month (but not quite filling the year) so that the whole partnership will pray for the same church in the same month. Here is this month's...

PRAYER FOR BRAMHALL URC

Wonderful God, we thank you for your congregation at Bramhall URC. For the words preached in your name amidst the bright stained glass.

This brightness extends to our community work, inside and outside the Church. We pray that your light may brighten the lives of people who attend our coffee mornings, Lunch and Chats, Knit and Knatter, SNAG events and other activities that we arrange, or we attend for the glory of your Kingdom.

We pray that our worship and community work may continue, and that new ideas and inspiration may emerge from all corners.

We do this for the glory of God that like the stained glass we may be a beacon of light, in Bramhall, the URC and throughout the world.

Amen.

HOLY SATURDAY

30 March ~ 11 am
in **Oak Meadow**
followed by hot drink
and mince pie



LECTIONARY for MARCH

3 MAR: Exodus 20.1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1.18-25; John 2.13-22

10 MAR: Numbers 21.4-9; Psalm 103.(1-7),8-13; Ephesians 2.1-10; John 3.14-21

17 MAR: Jeremiah 31.31-34; Psalm 51.1-12; Psalm 119.9-16; Hebrews 5.5-10; John 12.20-33

24 MAR: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 118.1-2,19-29; Philippians 2.5-11; Mark 11.1-11

31 MAR: Acts 10.34-43; Psalm 118.1-2,14-24; 1 Corinthians 15.1-11; Mark 16.1-8

URC AT CROSSROADS

A culture of listening and collective discernment; Relationships between local churches and wider church structures...

Several participants in the research noted how, at their best, synods equip local churches to carry out their mission, connecting them to resources and initiatives coming from the national level. One synod member of staff said:

We [synod] stand in the middle, because we reach out with one hand to the local church, and we reach out with the other hand to the centre.

Indeed, synods can ensure local churches and the Centre remain aware of each other, that tasks are not duplicated and decisions are made at the appropriate level of the denomination. "Congregations, synod and 'the Centre' belong together, they fit into each other and they relate to each other," said a synod member of staff.

Furthermore, other interviewees noted that the sweet spot of the work of synods is, as one interviewee put it, being "close enough to the local to understand a bit of what's going on, but far enough away to give [churches] a corporate sense of accountability so that people aren't completely [on their own]."

This being said, during the course of the research we came across congregations where the role of the synod was not clearly understood or the support it can offer was perceived to be limited. As a result, relationship between synod and local congregations was often limited. For example, a survey respondent said: "Our congregation is asking... what is Synod doing for us? Frankly we don't know. Please, can you itemise the actual, practical help you intend to give?"

Furthermore, survey and qualitative data we collected showed many churches feel weighed down by their obligations as charitable organisations, and by day-to-day administrative responsibilities. Expressing a recurring sentiment in the research, a respondent to the survey noted: *The URC asks a lot of congregations to maintain buildings – time, and money of maintenance, health and safety, compliance, copyright etc is complex and time consuming. More generic help e.g. templates and model policies would be incredibly helpful. During COVID we had very little support to navigate the different licences etc. we needed. We need a proper forum to share resources and expertise. Many churches feel weighed down by their obligations as charitable organisations.*

As this shows, congregations expect synod to help, and indeed, we learned of synods stepping in to provide support with areas such as safeguarding, compliance and other governance issues. But several interviewees cautioned against expecting synod to completely take over admin issues for local churches. A synod member of staff said:

We've done that with one of our churches recently... and it's absolutely swamped the paid staff of the synod. And, that's just one church. And so there's this tension: we'd love to say, 'Okay, give us your finances, we'll look after your bookkeeping', you know, 'We'll sort out your building contracts.' But actually, we're just not set up for that level of centralisation.

Moreover, some churches, especially very small, aging congregations that lack a full-time minister feel burdened by their mandatory M&M contributions, especially when this is a substantial part of their expenditure, and report failing to see its benefits. As a result, a sense of frustration sets in. We came across congregations feeling as if they were on their own, disconnected, and lacking meaningful relationship with synod.

Lack of relationship was even more acute in relation to the national level of the URC (Church House). In the absence of other intermediate structures, such as the now disbanded 'district councils', this feeling of alienation was compounded. Among other things, this prevents churches from being aware of each other and joining, where appropriate, in fellowship and mission. This is a particular problem where churches in an area are few and far between.

To address this problem, one of the synods we researched for this project created the role of a 'Synod Pastoral Advisor' tasked with creating and nurturing connections between local congregations and synod. As for the relationship between local congregations and Church House, we spoke to several local church leaders who felt disconnected from the national structures. Indeed, as one synod staff member put it: *Church House are, for many, 'faceless bureaucrats', there's a lack of personal relationship and also a lack of clarity regarding the organisation. They see Church House as 'them', as if they are in competition, rather than belonging together.*

Finances

The denomination finds itself in the paradoxical

position of being 'people poor', yet 'cash rich', with general congregational decline explaining both aspects. Concretely, as churches close and the denomination loses members, its financial situation paradoxically improves in part as a result of the proceeds from the sale of closed church buildings.

This paradoxical position is itself a generalisation, which holds in some geographical areas and synods more than in others. Some synods have more financial resources available than others and funds are either not always accessible to churches (as per above) or not accessed (e.g. missional grants). One leader noted in this regard: "It's amazing how few applications they [synod] get. People seem to be quite cautious or not willing to try new things."

This was explained in terms of the communication barrier we alluded to earlier, but also in terms of the local churches' limited capacity and vision for trying new things.

Several interviewees also decried the lack of sharing of financial resources between synods, suggesting new pathways should be forged and mechanisms be put in place to enable financial help to be given by wealthier synods to poorer ones in a spirit of missional collaboration and fellowship.

**Nathan Mladin
to be continued...**

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EASTER EVE or HOLY SATURDAY

Easter Eve is the last day of Lent, the day between Good Friday and Easter Day.

It represents the one full day that Jesus was dead. It is a day of quiet reflection and anticipation for Christians worldwide.

In various church traditions it is known as Easter Eve, Holy Saturday, the Great Sabbath, Hallelujah Saturday, Saturday of the Glory, or Black Saturday.

Easter Eve is often wrongly called Easter Saturday. Easter Saturday is actually the Saturday *following* Easter Sunday.

Most churches do not have any services on Easter Eve. In the Catholic Church, the altar remains stripped completely bare. Many

Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and other churches observe many of the same customs as the Catholic Church; however, their altars may be covered in black instead.

In the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Methodist traditions, Easter Eve lasts only until nightfall, after which the Easter Vigil is celebrated, and marking the official start of the Easter season.

What did Jesus do on that one full day in the grave? Christian understanding varies on this.

The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and most mainline Protestant churches teach that Jesus descended to the realm of the dead on Holy Saturday, to save the righteous souls who died before His crucifixion.

The catechism of the Catholic church calls the descent "the last phase of Jesus' messianic mission," during which He "opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before Him."

Often called "the Harrowing of Hell," the dramatic image of Jesus breaking down the doors of Hades has proved almost irresistible to some artists, from the painter Hieronymus Bosch to the poet Dante to countless Eastern Orthodox iconographers.

But some Protestants say there is little scriptural evidence for the detour to hell, and that even Jesus' own words contradict it. According to Luke's Gospel, on Good Friday, Jesus told the Good Thief crucified alongside Him that "today you will be with Me in Paradise,"

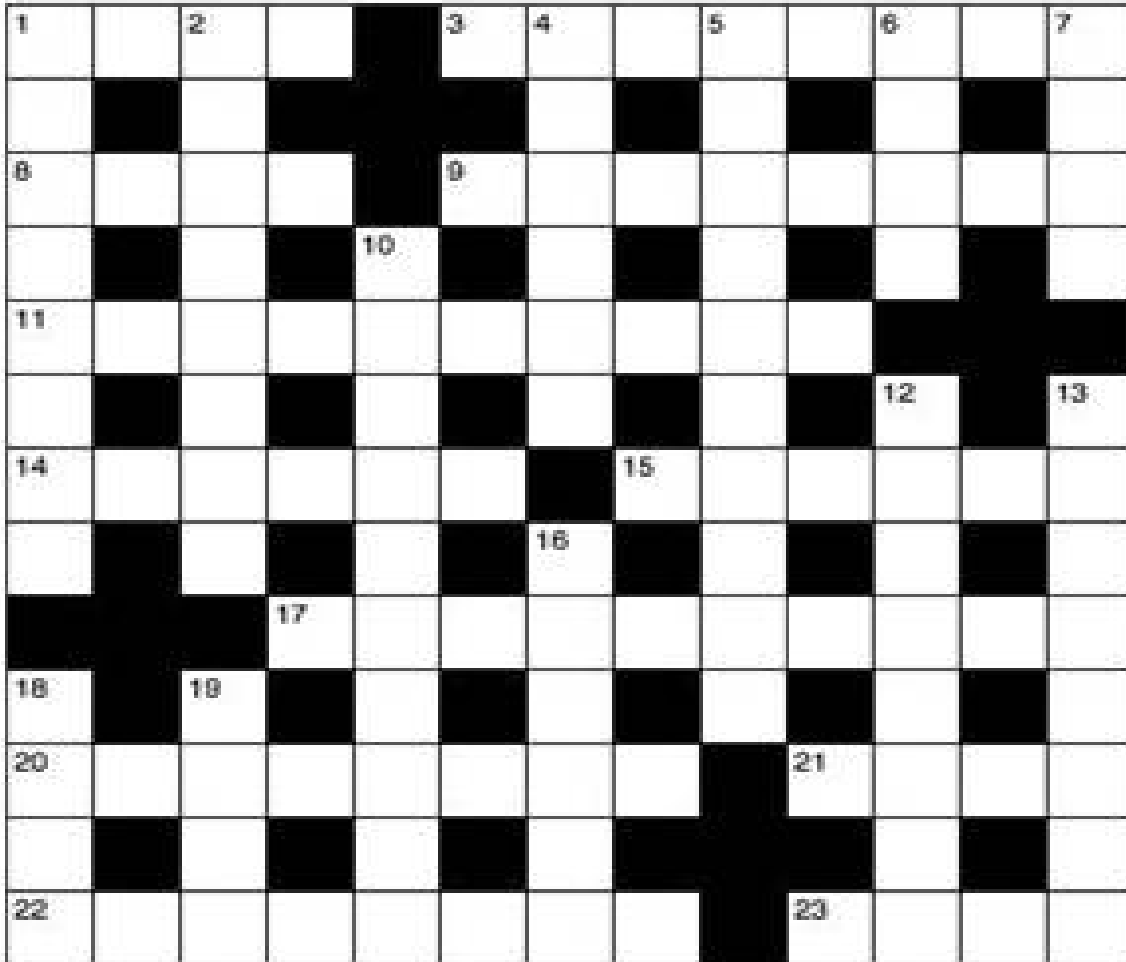
"That's the only clue we have as to what Jesus was going to do between death and resurrection," John Piper, a prominent evangelical author and pastor from Minnesota, has said. "I don't think the thief went to hell and that hell is called paradise."

The Bible says little about the interlude between Jesus' death and resurrection. It is beyond human witness, even beyond human comprehension. Churches that teach He descended to the realm of the dead usually quote 1 Peter 3:18-20. "Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit," Peter writes. "And it was by the Spirit that He went to preach to the spirits in prison."

This descent might not have become a doctrine if not for the fourth-century bishop named Rufinus. In his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, He added that Jesus went *ad inferna* (to hell).

The phrase stuck, but it was officially added to the influential creed only centuries later.

Parish Pump



Crossword for Easter 2024

Across

- 1 Made from the fruit of the vine, symbol of the blood of Christ (4)
 3 'You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on — — ' (Joshua 8:4) (3,5)
 8 Seep (4)
 9 Celebrated by Jesus on the night of his betrayal (Luke 22:15) (8)
 11 One of the supposed sites of Christ's burial place in Jerusalem (6,4)
 14 'A city on a hill — be hidden' (Matthew 5:14) (6)
 15 He inherited Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:12-13) (6)
 17 Where Jesus prayed 'Not as I will, but as you will' (Matthew 26:36, 39) (10)
 20 'Only in his home town and in his — — is a prophet without honour' (Matthew 13:57) (3,5)
 21 Sail (anag.) (4) 22 How Jesus was punished before his crucifixion (Matthew 27:26) (8)
 23 Eye sore (4)

Down

- 1 Can't grow (anag.) (5,3)
 2 A servant girl to Peter, 'You also were with that — , Jesus' (Mark 14:67) (8)
 4 Well-being (Proverbs 3:8) (6)
 5 Pentecostal denomination, — of God (10)
 6 One of the 'obvious' acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19, 21) (4)
 7 'I preached that they should repent and — to God' (Acts 26:20) (4)
 10 ' — — , the world will not see me any more, but you will see me' (John 14:19) (6,4)
 12 He betrayed Jesus: Judas — (Luke 6:16) (8)
 13 Jesus to Peter: ' — — of my sheep' (John 21:16) (4,4)
 16 The centurion said, 'Surely this man was — — of God' (Mark 15:39) (3,3)
 18 Baked bread (Mark 8:14) (4)
 19 'Blessing and honour, glory and power, be — Him' (Handel's Messiah) (4)

SERVICES

Elders' wish to keep everyone safe, so please stay home if you are unwell.

You may wear masks (perhaps for singing). Also, understand our plans may change with little notice.

We may sometimes have a speaker and sometimes a simple in-house led service. Video

conferencing continues and Leaders or readers may Zoom in or speak in church. **Duties** are

performed by a small team on a rota. Please check the board for changes.

Date	3 MAR	10 MAR		17 MAR	24 MAR
Service	Morning Worship	Morning Worship	MP Zoom Evening Service	Morning Worship	Morning Communion
Time	10.30 am	10.30 am	***6.30 pm***	10.30 am	10.30 am
Leader	Sandy & Morag Smith	Linda Rayner	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii	In House	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii
Elder Duty	P Oliver	A Stevens		B Stevens	S Smith / D Phillips
Door	M Morton	M Smith		Various	H Elsden D Green
Reader					
Flowers	Silk	R Pollitt		Silk	H Elsden
Coffee	D Green	C Davies		M Hardie	H Elsden
Notes		Mothering Sunday	Meeting ID: 717 0575 5463 Passcode 2Hs7w3		Palm Sunday

Date	28 MAR	29 MAR	31 MAR
Service	Tenebrae	Morning Worship	Morning Worship
Time	8.00 pm	10.30 am	10.30 am
Leader	Bernie Stevens	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii	Rev Kurauone Mutimwii
Elder Duty	A Stevens	CHEADLE HULME CLOSED	CHEADLE HULME CLOSED
Door	G Elsden		
Reader			SERVICE AT GATLEY URC
Flowers			
Coffee			
Notes	Maundy Thursday	Good Friday	Easter Sunday

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**SOUP, SWEET
& MEET**

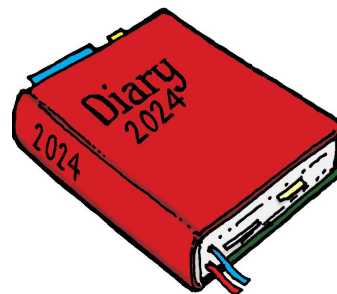
**Wed 20 MAR
12 noon**

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CHURCH REGISTERS

none

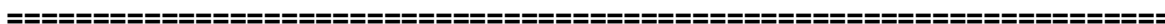
CALENDAR



.....to the best of the editor's knowledge, unless you know better...

MARCH

Fri 01	2 pm	World Day of Prayer at St Ann's RC
Sat 02	10.00~11.30am	Coffee Morning in aid of TRANSFORM TRADE 12~2pm CTCH Lent Lunch - URC
Sun 03		
Mon 04		
Tues 05		
Wed 06	10.30am Elders' meeting	7pm Joint Lent Bible Study ~ Bramhall URC
Thu 07		7.30 pm MP Steering Group ~Cheadle Trinity EP
Fri 08		
Sat 09	12~2pm	CTCH Lent Lunch - All Saints
Mon 11		
Tues 12		
Wed 13		
Thu 14		7pm Joint Lent Bible Study ~ Bramhall URC
Fri 15		
Sat 16	12~2pm	CTCH Lent Lunch ~ Friends
Mon 18		
Tues 19		
Wed 20	12~2pm SOUP, SWEET & MEET	7.30 pm Worship Group ~ Zoom
Thu 21		7pm Joint Lent Bible Study ~ Bramhall URC
Fri 22		
Sat 23	12~2pm	CTCH Lent Lunch ~ Methodist 2.30 pm Film Matinee
Sun 24	10.30am	Palm Sunday service
Mon 25		
Tues 26		
Wed 27		
Thu 28		8pm Maundy Thurs service ~ Cheadle Hulme URC
Fri 29	10.30am	Good Friday service at GATLEY URC
Sat 30	11am	CTCH Open Air Service at Oak Meadow CH
Sun 31	10.30am	EASTER Sunday Service at HEALD GREEN URC



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